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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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Forty-third session

UPDATE ON THE CIREFCA PROCESS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Continuing the process initiated at the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) in May 1989, the Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee (Second International Meeting) was held in San Salvador from 7 to 8 April 1992, marking a new milestone in the efforts of the seven participating States (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua) and the international community on behalf of uprooted Central Americans.

2. The purpose of this Note is to inform the Executive Committee of the outcome of the Second International Meeting and seek its support for the revised strategy and objectives of CIREFCA as well as the new arrangements in relation thereto. These are intended to respond to the diverse challenges now faced by the CIREFCA process in the five Central American countries, Belize and Mexico. On the one hand, protection and assistance efforts on behalf of Central American refugees and returnees must continue, requiring UNHCR to play a vital role. On the other hand, the inclusion of returnees in broad-based development plans, from the outset a key goal of CIREFCA, is a major challenge which must be addressed by development agencies. This issue, which has been brought to the attention of the Executive Committee 1/, is inextricably linked to current peace and democratization efforts in Central America and elsewhere.

II. EVOLUTION OF CIREFCA'S TARGET POPULATION

3. At CIREFCA in May 1989, official estimates put the number of persons uprooted by conflicts in the region at some 2 million. Of this number, 146,000 were registered refugees, usually assisted in camps by UNHCR, and 61,500 were assisted or spontaneous returnees. Internally and externally displaced persons, comprising the two largest groups, were roughly estimated to total 1.8 million.

4. Since 1989, the impact of the peace process on the situation of refugees and returnees has been extensive. Refugee camps, once synonymous with the fate of many Central American refugees, have virtually disappeared from the region and efforts to achieve socio-economic and legal integration for refugees remaining in countries of asylum have progressed well, especially in Costa Rica and, more recently, in Belize. Voluntary repatriation has risen sharply, totalling some 87,000, between January 1990 and March 1992, mainly to El Salvador and Nicaragua and, to a lesser extent, Guatemala. This trend towards durable solutions is also evident in UNHCR's programmes in the seven countries where the Special Programmes component, including CIREFCA returnee projects, has risen from 14 per cent of the overall total of $ 35.3 million in 1989 to 68 per cent of the (initial) projected total of $ 30.6 million for General and Special Programmes in 1993.

5. The main refugee problem in the region remaining to be resolved is that of the 45,000 Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, for whom a two-track approach is being pursued: increased voluntary repatriation when conditions in their country of origin permit and local integration for those opting not to return.

6. Attention to externally and/or internally displaced populations, especially in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, has, however, been minimal to date and CIREFCA's response to their special protection and assistance needs has not matched requirements, despite the significant impact of UNDP's Development Programme for Displaced Persons, Refugees and Returnees (PRODERE) in certain countries and the long-standing, vigorous efforts of NGOs.

III. THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL MEETING

7. The Second International Meeting in El Salvador thus took place in a new regional context, especially evident in the host country where the recently concluded peace accords present new prospects for national reconciliation. The aim of the Second International Meeting was to inform the international community of progress achieved in the implementation of the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action and of national strategies and projects to assist uprooted populations. Financial and political support was also sought for new/revised project proposals and the potential future direction of the CIREFCA process was assessed. Prior to the Second International Meeting, which was jointly organized by UNHCR and UNDP, a report 2/ had been prepared which analyzed progress in implementation of the CIREFCA Plan of Action, highlighted lessons learned during the process, and outlined future challenges.

8. The Second International Meeting was inaugurated by the Acting President of El Salvador and took place under the Chairmanship of the President of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee, the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua. Participation included 36 States, 18 intergovernmental organizations and 62 NGOs.

9. The Declaration 3/ adopted at the Second International Meeting reaffirmed the validity of key principles, criteria and commitments of the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action and outlined future action. The Declaration reiterated that the problem of uprootedness could only be resolved through the attaintment of peace, democracy and development, highlighting the importance of CIREFCA as a regional process, and stressing the need to ensure inclusion of the principles contained in the Concerted Plan of Action in national reconstruction and reconciliation efforts.

10. Satisfaction was also expressed at the progress achieved in implementing durable solutions for uprooted Central Americans since the First International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee (June 1990, New York). The increase in voluntary repatriation of all three refugee groups (Guatemalans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorians), particularly Nicaraguans and Salvadorians, was noted, as was the acceleration of socio-economic and legal integration in countries of asylum. It was recognized that for the first time since the beginning of the refugee problem in the region, returnees now outnumber refugees, posing new challenges in the area of returnee reintegration.

11. Based on an assessment of those tasks in the Concerted Plan of Action still to be completed (integration, repatriation and reintegration, along with attendant protection-related tasks), it was decided to extend the Plan's duration through May 1994. The participants also called upon UNHCR and UNDP to strengthen their support to CIREFCA, especially through the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit.

12. At the Second International Meeting, the seven participating countries presented a total of 65 projects with external financing requirements of $ 138.3 million. Of this amount nearly 77 per cent of total project needs related to the three countries of origin (El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua), thereby illustrating the increased emphasis on reintegration of uprooted populations and support to affected communities. To an unprecedented extent, NGOs were involved in the design of projects presented by Governments at the Meeting.

13. Contributions 4/ totalling $ 79.2 million were announced. Of this amount, $ 48.1 million covers additional support for CIREFCA projects, and $ 31.12 million other initiatives in the CIREFCA framework (support to national reconstruction/reconciliation programmes and demobilized combatants). Contributions towards UNHCR on this occasion totalled some $ 11.8 million for General and Special Programmes. In addition, several delegations stated that coverage of CIREFCA's target populations would be a key consideration in bilateral development aid.

14. The pledges announced at the Second International Meeting demonstrated CIREFCA's continued success as a platform for resource mobilization. Prior to the Meeting, resources generated at, and subsequent to, the First International Meeting in 1990 had totalled some $ 289.5 million 5/. This amount included funding mobilized for national CIREFCA projects, $ 115 million for PRODERE, contributions to regional activities (such as the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit), an estimated $ 60 million channelled directly to NGOs and $ 44.5 million for the International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV).

IV. CIREFCA'S STRATEGY: 1992-1994

15. Shortly after the Second International Meeting, UNHCR and UNDP conducted an analysis of the roles each agency should play during the two-year extension of CIREFCA's time-frame. Through consultations with Governments and UNHCR/UNDP Field Offices in the Central American region during missions of the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, national priorities relating to CIREFCA's target populations have been updated.

16. This effort led to the formulation of a work-plan for 1992-1994, intended to create consensus amongst donors and convening countries regarding CIREFCA's strategies and objectives. 6/ At the regional level, key goals include the updating and promotion of the CIREFCA legal document 7/ (in the light of experience gained through practice since May 1989), as well as promotion and dissemination of the norms, standards and criteria contained therein. The work plan focuses attention on strengthening the role of NGOs and beneficiary communities in project design and implementation. In each of the seven countries, CIREFCA's goals have been set in four main areas (institutional, legal/protection, technical and financial), together with the relevant UNHCR/UNDP activities needed to achieve them.

17. Priority is also given to the need to define a strategy for linkage to guarantee the inclusion of CIREFCA's fundamental principles and mechanisms for concerted action in national reconstruction/reconciliation efforts and in human development and poverty alleviation programmes; the strengthening of national and regional capacities to address the problem of uprooted populations; and the formulation of a resource-mobilization strategy which takes into account the dramatic, post-conflict needs in the region and seeks to tap financial support from both humanitarian and developmental aid sources.

18. A determined effort is also under way to reflect the lessons learned to date in current and future CIREFCA initiatives. Above all, in countries of origin, efforts are being put into practice to "bridge the gap" between UNHCR's limited returnee reintegration efforts and broad-based development plans. Some examples are the handover by UNHCR of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in Nicaragua to the Government for direct implementation, as well as active UNHCR involvement in working out coordinating/monitoring arrangements for QIP activities in specific regions of the country with bilateral development agencies and UNDP, in preparation for the UNHCR phase-out of this programme by mid-1993. To disseminate the QIP concept and methodology, a

seminar was recently held in Nicaragua involving field staff from UNHCR, UNDP, NGOs and the Government. In El Salvador, concerted action among all parties, including NGOs and the target populations, has increased the community-based focus of the UNDP-supported National Reconstruction Plan.

19. In Guatemala, in particular, an inter-agency approach has been adopted from the beginning of preparations for the eventual mass repatriation and reintegration of Guatemalan refugees from Mexico. As a result, UNDP, UNHCR, the "Comision Especial de Ayuda a Refugiados, Repatriados y Desplazadós" (CEAR) and NGOs participated in the identification mission for the recently initiated programme of QIPs in returnee communities. Returnee areas will also benefit considerably from investments in infrastructure and productive activities through the UNDP-supported "Fondo Nacional para la Paz" (FONAPAZ). Moreover, PRODERE has supported a study on the delicate issue of land-tenure/availability, currently a crucial factor in negotiations over mass repatriation of Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. Returnees and internally displaced persons are also beneficiaries of PRODERE's integrated development programme in the department of El Quiche and in urban areas adjacent to Guatemala City.

20. In view of the importance of addressing the special situation of uprooted women, attention to women's needs and potential has increased in all CIREFCA programmes, owing to the awareness and momentum created by the the First Regional Forum on a Gender Approach to Work with Refugee, Returnee and Displaced Women (FOREFEM) which took place in Guatemala City, within the framework of CIREFCA, in February 1992. As a result, a work-plan has been drawn up at the regional/national level which reinforces training, technical evaluation of current projects to ensure the full integration of women and the regular exchange of experience and information. To reinforce these efforts, arrangements are being made to obtain the services of a Women-in-Development Expert to be assigned to the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit.

V. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

21. The support of UNHCR and UNDP to implementation of the CIREFCA Concerted Plan of Action through their programmes, has varied according to their respective mandates and expertise in relation to the challenges at hand. Consequently, local integration efforts in countries of asylum (e.g. Belize and Costa Rica) are at present being supported mainly by UNHCR, with technical assistance from UNDP. In Honduras, where refugee/repatriation issues have been virtually resolved, UNDP is gradually assuming the lead for CIREFCA follow-up. In Mexico, where durable solutions for Guatemalan refugees are closely linked to the situation prevailing in their country of origin, UNHCR has the primary role. In countries of origin (El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua) UNHCR has or will promote voluntary repatriation, seek to ensure respect for basic protection and human rights principles, and support initial reintegration efforts. In these same countries, UNDP provides support with Indicative Planning Figures (IPF) resources to reintegration and development programmes of national scope linked to the respective peace accords. 8/

22. UNHCR and UNDP provide technical support to CIREFCA follow-up through the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, based in San Jose, Costa Rica, thereby complementing to the efforts of their respective field offices. Other functions of the Unit include policy analysis, promotion of the Concerted Plan of Action, information, follow-up and evaluation. The Unit is staffed by a team of five UNHCR/UNDP professionals and respective experts at national level and jointly funded by UNHCR and UNDP. From the outset, the Joint Support Unit has proved a dynamic force in the CIREFCA process and its follow-up, successfully harnessing the expertise of both agencies and attracting international recognition on various occasions.

23. In light of the new situation prevailing in the region, the Second International Meeting signalled a turning point for UNHCR in terms of the level and scope of support it has provided to date to CIREFCA. Given the increased focus on integration/reintegration processes it is obvious that the nature and scope of UNHCR/UNDP support should be adjusted as a function of the challenges which remain. In this regard, however, both UNHCR and UNDP have been sensitive to the desire expressed by various parties following the Second International Meeting that a gradual and phased transition occur in inter-agency arrangements. As a result, the High Commissioner has agreed that UNHCR will continue to act as "lead agency" until June 1993, while asserting that the Office will naturally continue its usual responsibilities and programmes, in accordance with its mandate, throughout and beyond the duration of CIREFCA.

24. Provided the necessary consensus exists among donor and convening countries as to the future direction of the CIREFCA process, and the funding strategy this implies, UNDP has confirmed its willingness to assume formally the lead-agency function as of mid-1993 and, inter-alia, appoint the next Head of the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit at that time. In practical terms, therefore, UNDP would assume overall responsibility, albeit with active UNHCR participation, for CIREFCA technical support and follow-up, with convening countries, donors and NGOs. To this end, UNDP will increase the level of human and financial resources allocated to the Joint Support Unit from January 1993 to August 1994.

25. For its part, and in appreciation of the value attached by all parties to its contribution to CIREFCA, UNHCR is prepared to maintain its participation in the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, albeit at a lower level than in prior years, provided the necessary financial support can be secured. The UNHCR budget for the Unit from January 1993 to August 1994 is estimated to amount to some $ 1 million.

26. UNHCR and UNDP have proposed a three-month time-frame, ending November 1992, to complete consultations with donors and convening countries regarding the future direction of the CIREFCA process and the institutional contribution required by both agencies in support thereof. To this end, UNDP/UNHCR consultations are currently under way with donor countries and a meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee will take place at end September 1992.

VI. THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

27. The CIREFCA process, based on the principle of concerted action and dialogue among all parties, in the context of peace, democracy and development, has proved a unique and integrated approach to solutions for refugees, returnees and displaced persons. CIREFCA's success is evidenced by the marked evolution in the situation of the various target populations, particularly refugees and returnees, since the launching of the process over three years ago.

28. Having contributed to the attainment of peace in Central America, the challenge now confronting CIREFCA is to play a meaningful role in the various national reconciliation processes, in line with the intent of the Declaration adopted at the Second International Meeting in El Salvador. In operational terms, CIREFCA must, therefore, make the greatest possible impact on the welfare of uprooted populations in the months ahead since their situation is linked to the successful implementation of the peace accords themselves. Indeed, this factor was recognized by the Presidents of the five Central American countries at the signing of the Equipulas II Agreements 9/ in August 1987 when they stated that there could be no lasting peace without initiatives to resolve the problem of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in the region.

29. It is UNHCR's view that, provided they are carried out by all parties, the plans outlined above could could help achieve this aim, thus enabling the successful completion of the CIREFCA process in May 1994.

NOTES

1/ "Bridging the Gap Between Returnee Aid and Development - a Challenge for the International Community", EC/SC.2/56.

2/ Report of 31 March 1992, "From Conflict to Peace and Development", (CIREFCA/CS/92/10).

3/ "Declaration of the Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee" (CIREFCA/CS/92/11 of 9 April 1993).

4/ "Pledges to CIREFCA", CIREFCA/CS/92.INF.4 of 8 April 1992. (Note: Total amount of $ 51.55 for CIREFCA projects has since been amended to $ 48.11 million).

5/ "Second Status Report on Implementation of CIREFCA Plan of Action", CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, February 1992.

6/ "Proposed Future Contents of the CIREFCA Process", CIREFCA Joint Support Unit, Costa Rica, 15 August 1992.

7/ "Principles and Criteria for the Protection of and Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Latin America" (CIREFCA/89/9 of April 1989).

8/ For additional information on UNHCR programmes in Latin America, including CIREFCA projects, see A/AC.96/793(Part IV).

9/ Procedure for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America, A/42/521-S/19085, annex; see Official Records of the Security Council, Forty-second Year, Supplement for July, August and September 1987, document S/19085.

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Corrigendum

Paragraph 8, third line

For Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, read Vice-Minister of the Presidency.

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